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Memories of War: The Grand Army of the Republic.

The Civil War experience did not end when the shooting stopped in 1865, and no organization did more to sustain the memory of the conflict than the Grand Army of the Republic. The GAR, as it was often called, was the largest Union veterans' group.



Farnsworth Post members gather at St. Paul's, Memorial Day 1887.

Enrollment peaked at 490,000 members in 1890, and the order's prestige and influence was enhanced through the election of five members to the White House.

Located in Mt. Vernon, the Farnsworth Post New York 170 of the GAR was founded in 1880. Fifteen years after Union victory, this was a time of great expansion for the veterans group -- memories of the horrors of the war had faded, but recollections of shared commitment and sacrifice remained strong. Enlisting 175 members, the Farnsworth post was involved in a myriad of fraternal and charitable activities

among members -- free medical care and medicine, cash relief payments and services, burial costs, financial assistance to widows and orphans. Educational and patriotic programs disseminated information on the significance of the war and the role of the Union soldiers. A secret initiation rite, modeled on that of the Masons, reinforced a special bond among the former soldiers.

Representing Union veterans, the GAR's public activities were closely aligned with the Republicans, the party of Lincoln and Grant. It was difficult to secure the nomination for local offices without GAR endorsement, leading to the nickname "Generally All Republicans."

This affiliation with the nation's dominant party, combined with excellent organizing abilities and widespread gratitude toward the Union soldiers, produced the first successful national lobby. The GAR played a major role in passage of the Dependant Pension Act of 1890, which created



Stephen Hunt, veteran of 8th NY Heavy Artillery, chaplain of the Farnsworth post.

monthly pensions for thousands of veterans and widows, including many people interred at St. Paul's. Dispensing \$1 billion by 1907, these payments were the largest expenditure in the Federal budget.

Christianity underscored the Farnsworth ritual. Chairs in the lodge room were arranged in the form of a cross. A Bible rested on an altar at the center of the lodge; prayers and references to Jesus were included in the weekly gatherings. These religious emphases appealed to Stephen Hunt, whose spiritual and social life was anchored at St. Paul's, directing the Sunday school for 40 years and serving on the vestry board for 58 years. A carpenter by trade, Hunt fought with the 8th New York Heavy Artillery, experiencing heavy combat in the Virginia fighting of 1864-5. Hunt's religious faith merged with pride in his military service, and it's not surprising that he volunteered as chaplain of Farnsworth Post 170. Reflecting the political connection of the order, Hunt also served as a local Republican official, hosting paper ballot primaries in his home of South 4th



Veteran places flag at grave of Civil War soldier, St. Paul's, Memorial Day 1922.

Avenue, less than a mile from St. Paul's. His part in the Union army's victory over the South helped sustain the former corporal in his twilight years, receiving a pension beginning in 1890, and obtaining his last monthly payment of \$20 (about \$500 in today's money), days before passing August 10, 1910, at age 81, and interment at St. Paul's.

Memorial Day exercises at St. Paul's symbolized the bond between the living Farnsworth men and the dead Union veterans. With eighteen members of the post buried in the five acre cemetery, the church functioned as the group's spiritual fulcrum. The unit's history recalls that "the muffled drum beat on Memorial Day, is heard but faintly, though with reverence, as the members of the Farnsworth Post wend their way once more to the graves of comrades who have gone before."